

## Plutarch on Anaximander's Zoogony (*Quaest. Conv.* VII 8. 4 730E = 12 A 30 DK)

Alexandra A. Pimenova

St. Petersburg State University,

7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; a.a.pimenova@inbox.ru

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In *Quaestiones Convivales* (730E), Plutarch notes that according to Anaximander's zoogony first living creatures originated in fish, like οἱ γαλεοί, one species of Selachia, which corresponds to modern dogfish. Plutarch describes this kind of fish also in two other treatises (*De sollertia animalium* 982A and *De amore prolis* 494C). In the two latter instances Plutarch refers to two peculiarities of the dogfishes, namely their way of breeding which resembles the mammals and the way of nursing their youth — mother lets it swim around, feed itself and then takes the offspring back inside her body. Aristotle duly observed both peculiarities (*HA* I 5. 489b11 f.; VI 10. 565b24) as typical for the majority of *Selachia* (a broader class than modern *Selachii*, or sharks), including γαλεοί, and it is almost certain that Plutarch depends on this report. On the contrary, there is no reason to believe with some scholars that Plutarch had in view Aristotle's famous description of one species of γαλεοί, namely γαλεὸς λεῖος (*mustelus levis*) with its unusual mode of breeding the youth (*HA* 565b2–9). In his testimony for Anaximander Plutarch does not have nursing in view — his point is only the womb-like conditions in which the young develop before birth within mother's body. The comparison with the dogfishes is thus more trivial than often assumed and might, of course, stem from Anaximander. More probable, nevertheless, that it was added by Plutarch himself in order to make his discourse about abstinence from fish more impressive.

**Keywords:** Anaximander, Plutarch, Aristotle, zoogony, dog-fish, *mustelus levis*.

We possess five testimonies for Anaximander's views on zoogony: four of them — Hippolytus (A 11 D-K), Ps.-Plutarch (A 10), Aetius and Censorinus (A 30) — reiterate an almost the same story: the first living creatures appeared in the water later to be evaporated by the sunlight. A man originated in creatures resembling fish or in membranes (maybe with thorns for protection — Aet. A30). He was growing inside these creatures till he became capable of taking care of himself. Then, after the water was evaporated, these creatures (or membranes) came out onto the land and were torn apart from the inside. In such a way, according to Anaximander, a completely developed man appeared.

The fifth testimony is puzzling. In *Quaestiones convivales* (VIII 8. 4 730E [12 A 30 DK]) Plutarch states, referring to Anaximander's doctrine, that the first men originated and were nurtured *like* γαλεοί:

οἱ δ' ἄφ' Ἑλλήνος τοῦ παλαιοῦ καὶ πατρογενεῖω Ποσειδῶνι θύουσιν, ἐκ τῆς ὑγρᾶς τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὐσίας φῦναι δόξαντες ὥς καὶ Σύριοι· διὸ καὶ σέβονται τὸν ἰχθύν ὥς ὁμογενῆ καὶ σύντροφον ἐπιεικέστερον Ἀναξιμάνδρου φιλοσοφοῦντες· οὐ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐκεῖνος ἰχθύς καὶ ἀνθρώπος, ἀλλ' ἐν ἰχθύσιν ἐγγενέσθαι τὸ πρῶτον ἀνθρώπου ἀποφαίνεται καὶ τραφέντας —

ὥσπερ οἱ γαλεοὶ — καὶ γενομένους ἱκανοὺς ἑαυτοῖς βοηθεῖν ἐκβῆναι τηνικαῦτα καὶ γῆς λαβέσθαι. καθάπερ οὖν τὸ πῦρ τὴν ὕλην, ἐξ ἧς ἀνήφθη, μητέρα καὶ πατέρα οὔσαν ἦσθιεν, ὥς ὁ τὸν Κήνκος γάμον εἰς τὰ Ἡσιόδου παρεμβάλων εἴρηκεν, οὕτως ὁ Ἀναξίμανδρος τῶν ἀνθρώπων πατέρα καὶ μητέρα κοινὸν ἀποφῆνας τὸν ἰχθὺν διέβαλε πρὸς τὴν βρῶσιν.

“Those descended from ancient Hellen make sacrifices also to Poseidon the Progenitor, believing, like the Syrians, that man had taken his origin in the moist substance. For this reason they revere a fish as being of the same race with them and of like nurture. In this they philosophize more justly than Anaximander. For he declares, not that fishes and men came into being in the same place, but that men came into being and were reared inside fishes — like dogfishes — and when they grew enough to look after themselves, they came from fishes and took to the land.<sup>1</sup> Hence, like the fire devoured the forest from which it was born and which was its father and mother (as the person says, who added the *Marriage of Ceyx* among Hesiod’s poems), so Anaximander misrepresented the fish for the purpose of using it as food, declaring it the common father and mother of humans.”

Scholars disagree on whether the comparison of the nurturing of the first men with the nurturing of their youth by *galeoi* goes back to Anaximander. Before discussing this question, some difficulties of Plutarch’s passage itself should be noted.

First of all, the ground for comparison between the attitudes to eating fishes of ‘Hellen’s descendants’<sup>2</sup> and that of Anaximander should be considered. The last phrase (οὕτως ὁ Ἀναξίμανδρος κτλ.) is sometimes understood so as if Anaximander tried to avert from eating fish.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is based presumably on the attested meaning διαβάλλω πρὸς τι ‘divert from a course of action’.<sup>4</sup> However, in both examples cited in the LSJ for this usage (Plut. *Mor.* 809F; Arr. *Epict. Diss.* II 26. 2) the construction is διαβάλλω τινα πρὸς τι, i.e. this meaning stems from the more concrete meaning of διαβάλλω ‘set smb. in variance with smb./smth.’ (LSJ, s.v. διαβάλλω III).<sup>5</sup> This surely does not fit our case in which διαβάλλω almost certainly has τὸν ἰχθὺν as the object. Moreover, this clearly contradicts the context: Anaximander’s teaching is compared with the *Ceyx’ Marriage* which depicted fire as the son of the wood which devours his parent, and is opposed to the more just attitude of the descendants of Hellen. Evidently, Plutarch’s Nestor means that Anaximander

<sup>1</sup> This part of translation is after Kirk, Raven 1957, 141.

<sup>2</sup> The exact meaning of these words is obscure. Provided that the manuscript text is sound, Plutarch’s speaker, Nestor says that there are some Greeks who worship Poseidon Patrogenios (the epithet is otherwise not attested), and they do not eat fish; this means, as he infers from Poseidon’s epithet, that they treat Poseidon, that is water, as parental substance, and one can thus suppose that they abstain from fishes, because they regard them as their relatives: their attitude thus resembles that of Syrians (see above, 731d), for whom he also supposes the similar reverence of fishes as relatives (the implied idea is in all probability that all Syrians, not only priests as it is the case in Egyptians who were discussed at 729 a, abstain from fish, cf. evidence for this view of Syrians, cited by Haussleiter 1935, 41). Nestor sides with Plutarch’s own explanation of abstinence from fish given earlier in the text (729d–731d), which is based on justice toward animals, and adds a specific point of man’s kinship with fishes which Plutarch does not share.

<sup>3</sup> See the translation in Loeb edition: “Anaximander, by revealing the fish as the common father and mother of mankind, made it scandalous to eat them”, Kahn 1960, 71: “he deprecated the eating of fish”; cf. Russian translation by J. Borovskij; translation by Georg Wöhrle (“so hat Anaximander den Fisch als Vater und Mutter zugleich der Menschen aufgewiesen und ihn zu [ihrer] Nahrung deklariert”) is closer to the sense (Wöhrle 2012, 45).

<sup>4</sup> See LSJ s.v. διαβάλλω VII.

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 809F: by means of blame one makes a person set at variance with vice, i.e. avert from it; Arr. *Epict. Diss.* II. 26. 2, lit. ‘every human soul by nature has been set at variance with internal contradictions’.

turned fish into parents of men, but the parents who served as food for their children — as forest is simultaneously the parent and the food to the fire. Thus, the meaning of τὸν ἰχθὺν διέβαλε πρὸς τὴν βρώσιν is that Anaximander, according to the speaker, *misrepresented* fish showing that it is fit for human food and made this in the manner similar to the poet of the *Ceyx' Marriage*, by representing the first men as eating their parents, that is to say as parasitizing on fish by living in it; this had to serve as a paradigm for further eating fishes by men. 'Hellen's descendants' who treat fishes and humans as born in the same element, viz. as close relatives, but not dependent on each other, are more just than Anaximander because they do not encourage using fishes as food.

Secondly, it is useful to bear in mind that γαλεοί is a conjecture proposed by Adolf Emperius instead of the manuscript reading παλαιοί, which does not give any sense. The emendation is based on two Plutarch's passages which describe the dogfish, and is next to certain. Nevertheless, both passages deserve discussion, because they shed new light on the meaning of the text in which Plutarch cites Anaximander and on his understanding of Anaximander's teaching.

The first and the more important comes from *De sollertia animalium* 33. 982A:

τίκτουσι μὲν γὰρ ὥσιν, εἶτα <τὸ> ζῶον οὐκ ἐκτὸς ἀλλ' ἐντὸς ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ τρέφουσιν οὕτω καὶ φέρουσιν ὥσπερ ἐκ δευτέρας γενέσεως· ὅταν δὲ μείζονα γένηται, μεθιάσι θύραζε καὶ διδάσκουσι νήχεσθαι πλησίον· εἶτα πάλιν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τοῦ στόματος ἐπαναλαμβάνουσι καὶ παρέχουσιν ἐνδαιατᾶσθαι τὸ σῶμα χώραν ἅμα καὶ τροφήν καὶ καταφυγὴν, ἄχρις ἂν ἐν δυνάμει τοῦ βοηθεῖν αὐτοῖς γένηται.

"They both lay an egg and later produce offspring not outside, but inside themselves; after that they nurture and bring it forth<sup>6</sup> as if by second birth. When the offspring gets bigger, they release it and teach to swim nearby. Then they suck it back inside themselves through the mouth and give their bodies as place, food and shelter to live in, until [the offspring] is capable of helping itself."

The second description Plutarch gives in the *De amore prolis*, 494C:

μάλιστα δ' οἱ γαλεοὶ ζωογονοῦσι μὲν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ἐκβαίνειν δὲ παρέχουσιν ἐκτὸς καὶ νέμεσθαι τοῖς σκυμνίοις, εἶτα πάλιν ἀναλαμβάνουσι καὶ περιπτύσσουσιν ἐγκοιμώμενα τοῖς σπλάγχνοις.

"The dogfishes are most of all other fishes capable of producing the offspring inside themselves; they also let the offspring come out and feed itself, and then take it back and cover it when it sleeps with their guts."

It should be noted that in both instances cited Plutarch reports two peculiarities of the dogfishes, their mode of breeding which resembles the mammals and the remarkable mode of nursing their youth — mother lets it swim around, feed themselves and then go back inside her body. W. Guthrie points out that in these two descriptions Plutarch follows Aristotle: "the smooth dogfish, 'Mustelus levis' [...], a viviparous variety which furnishes the subject of one of the Aristotle's most celebrated descriptions, and a famous example of his anatomical erudition".<sup>7</sup> Some sort of dependence is in fact plausible but the story is not

<sup>6</sup> LSJ s.v. φέρω V

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie 1962, 104, citing Thompson 1947, 41.

a simple one. First of all, Aristotle held to the view that not only the smooth dogfish but the majority of selachia lay eggs internally. Thus Plutarch rightly states that the internal oviparity is peculiar to all dogfishes, not specifically smooth ones (*HA* I 5. 489b11 f.; VI 10. 564b15–18).<sup>8</sup>

In *Historia Animalium* VI.10. 565b2–9 Aristotle describes the unusual breeding of the smooth dogfish:

Οἱ δὲ καλούμενοι λείοι τῶν γαλεῶν τὰ μὲν ψὰ ἴσχουσι μεταξὺ τῶν ὑστερῶν ὁμοίως τοῖς σκυλίοις, περιμόντα δὲ ταῦτα εἰς ἑκατέραν τὴν δικρόαν τῆς ὑτέρας καταβαίνει, καὶ τὰ ζῶα γίνονται τὸν ὀμφαλὸν ἔχοντα πρὸς τῇ ὑτέρᾳ, ὥστε ἀναλίσκομένων τῶν ψῶν ὁμοίως δοκεῖν ἔχειν τὸ ἐμβρυον τοῖς τετράποσιν. Προσπέφυκε δὲ μακρὸς ὢν ὁ ὀμφαλὸς τῆς μὲν ὑτέρας πρὸς τῷ κάτω μέρει, ὥσπερ ἐκ κοτυληδόνος ἕκαστος ἡρτημένος, τοῦ δ' ἐμβρύου κατὰ τὸ μέσον, ἢ τὸ ἥπαρ.

“So-called smooth dogfishes have their eggs between the parts of the uterus, in a similar way to the ‘puppy’ [*scyllium canicula* and *scyllium stellare*], and they move along into each of the two ‘horns’ of the uterus: the young are produced with the umbilical cord attached to the uterus, so that as the substance of the egg gets used up the embryo’s condition appears to be similar to what is found in quadrupeds. The umbilical cord, which is long, is attached to the lower part of the uterus: each one is, as it were, fastened to a cotyledon, and is attached to the embryo by the middle, where the liver is situated.”<sup>9</sup>

Although this is the most impressive instance of description of internal oviparity among the dogfishes, none of those three Plutarch’s passages cited refers to the specific details of it;<sup>10</sup> nor does Plutarch mention specifically the smooth dogfishes.

A more credible instance of Plutarch’s dependence on Aristotle’s report is that the most part of the dogfishes (not specifically the smooth dogfishes) release their offspring and take it back inside, *HA* 565b24:

Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι γαλεοὶ καὶ ἐξαφίᾳσι καὶ δέχονται εἰς ἑαυτοὺς τοὺς νεοττοὺς, καὶ αἱ ρίνας καὶ αἱ νάρκαι (ἦδη δ' ὥφθη νάρκη μεγάλη περὶ ὀγδοήκοντα ἔχουσα ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἐμβρυα), ὁ δ' ἀκανθίας οὐκ εἰσδέχεται μόνος τῶν γαλεῶν διὰ τὴν ἀκανθαν. Τῶν δὲ πλατέων τρυγῶν καὶ βάτος οὐ δέχονται διὰ τὴν τραχύτητα τῆς κέρκου.

“With one exception dogfish can both release and take in again their young: the angel-fish and the torpedo-fish can do it (a large torpedo-fish has been recorded with about eighty embryos inside it): the exception is the spiny dogfish; this is the only dogfish which cannot take them in, and this is because of the spine. Of the broad selachis, the string-ray and the batos (ray) cannot take them owing to the roughness of their tails.”<sup>11</sup>

This corresponds to the feature of dogfishes Plutarch describes in *De sollertia animalium* 33, 982A and *De amore prolis*, 494C.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For the comparison of Aristotle’s views with the data of the modern biology, see Zierlein 2013, 202–203.

<sup>9</sup> Text and translation are after Peck 1970, 259–261.

<sup>10</sup> Even though Aristotle’s description of smooth dogfish was well-known, for a long time no one could confirm or contradict it, until in 1842 Johann Müller did not publish the research of species affined to the smooth dogfish, which largely proved the correctness of Aristotle’s description and showed that it is more accurate than the descriptions made by some modern scholars.

<sup>11</sup> Peck, 1970, 263.

<sup>12</sup> L. Bodson 1983, 401–402 brought forward an alternative interpretation of this Aristotle’s passage. According to her, Aristotle describes not releasing and taking in again of the already born young fishes, but the development of the embryo of sharks and skates: “1) Egg-cell formation in the female’s ovary;

Coming back to Plutarch, first of all we need to understand what he had in mind when comparing the first humans with the young of a dogfish. J. Burnet supposed that Plutarch (and, as he thought, Anaximander as well) refers to the only one peculiarity described by Aristotle — the development of dogfish's embryo resembling that of mammals; but not the second one — the capacity of dog-fish to give forth and take back the born cub which he takes to be a popular lore.<sup>13</sup> W. Guthrie argued to the contrary that the comparison is related (again both in Plutarch and Anaximander) to both these peculiarities. "Much as one would like to discover such faithfulness to observed fact in the first youth of Greek natural philosophy, it seems hardly likely that Anaximander disowned a belief which was still seriously held by Aristotle, and which undoubtedly provides the best illustration for his purpose".<sup>14</sup>

But however reasonable this might appear, Guthrie seems to be wrong. Although Plutarch in the parallel texts mentions both of these features (*De soll. an.* 982A — development of sharks; *De amore prolis* 494C — the capacity to give forth and take back), in *Quaest. conv.* VIII, 730F he explicitly refers only to the infant's breeding inside the fish, i. e. embryonic period ("the men were first born in fish, and having been nurtured in the manner of *galei* and become capable of looking after themselves, they emerged and occupied the land"). It follows also from the point of his comparison: he stresses that the first humans were parasitizing on fish, 'eating of it', like the young of dogfish; *pace* Guthrie, the second peculiarity of dogfishes, giving forth and taking back the cub, is irrelevant for this context. Again, it is unlikely that Plutarch ascribed to Anaximander the exploitation of this feature of a dogfish in his doctrine — on evidence we have, the human beings remained permanently inside fishes until they reached the maturity.

But it is worth pointing out that although Burnet is right and Plutarch, comparing the development of the first men in Anaximander's theory with that of dogfishes, is thinking about the development of an embryo, it does not mean that Plutarch has in view the specific development of smooth dogfish described by Aristotle, as Burnet supposes. As it has been shown, Plutarch does not mention any of specific details Aristotle reports. In *De soll. an.* 982A and *De amore prolis* 494C Plutarch also ascribes internal oviparity to dogfishes on the whole.

However, we are left with an unanswered question: could the comparison between the birth of first men and that of dogfish go back to Anaximander himself? G. S. Kirk remarks that ὥσπερ οἱ γαλεοὶ "may well be a parenthetical remark by Plutarch <...>; he would naturally quote them as an illustration of Anaximander's idea."<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Ch. Kahn focuses on the context of Plutarch's fragment. He believes that Plutarch "has enlarged upon the meager doxographical information in order to make Anaximander's view fit better into a convivial discussion of 'why the Pythagoreans rejected fish more than all

2) Internal fertilization; 3) Migration of the eggs through the oviduct to the shell gland or nidamental gland; 4) Discharge of the egg cases into the body cavity or uterus, where the embryos are kept in separate uterine compartments for the entire period of gestation. This period varies from species to species: 10 or 11 months in the placental smooth dogfish, as long as 22 to 24 months in the nonplacental spiny dogfish. The young are brought forth alive, fully developed, and able to go out on their own as experienced predators". The discussion of this interesting view is beyond the scope of my paper; suffice it to say that Plutarch or his source understood this passage the way the majority of modern scholars do.

<sup>13</sup> Burnet 1920, 46.

<sup>14</sup> Guthrie 1962, 104.

<sup>15</sup> Kirk, Raven 1957, 142 note 1.

other animals”.<sup>16</sup> Guthrie on the contrary disagreed with Kirk and noted that “inhabitants of an ancient seaport probably knew more about the facts of life among fishes than do the unscientific among ourselves”.<sup>17</sup> Other scholars retain the comparison with the dogfish as part of Anaximander teaching.<sup>18</sup>

Now, opposing the references of dogfish in passages of Aristotle and Plutarch, we have seen, contrary to Guthrie and his opponents, that Plutarch, by way of his comparison with the dogfishes, does not have in view any specific way of gestation of an embryo of the smooth dogfishes, but a much more trivial fact of the internal oviparity shared by all dogfishes. This can be the knowledge which was more easily accessible to Anaximander. We surely cannot say, whether the parallel between the origin of first men and the gestation of dogfish drawn by Plutarch goes back to Anaximander’s teaching. On the other hand, — and this more likely — the comparison could also be Plutarch’s own addition, since in *Quest. conv.* he aims to draw men as the descendants of fish, in which they grew and develop before being born, just like nowadays dogfish breed their offspring.

Nevertheless, even without this comparison Plutarch’s passage retains its value as a testimony for Anaximander’s zoogony and deserves special attention because it draws on an earlier source. Putting aside the points which are relevant to Plutarch’s vegetarian context only, this testimony for Anaximander’s teaching is significant due to the following: first, according to Plutarch, the man originally lived inside fishes, not membranes or some animals; second, it goes about *man*’s birth and nurturing inside fishes, not about transformation of man from one species to another; third, the men emerge from fishes and get to land at an age when they were already capable of taking care of themselves, that is the point similar to one made by Pseudo-Plutarch on the impossibility of a man being born directly fully developed, unlike other animals. The story is most similar to Censorinus’ testimony, but contrary to Censorinus, Plutarch does not mention the rupture of fishes at the moment when human beings go outside.

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<sup>16</sup> Kahn 1960, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Guthrie 1962, 104 note 2.

<sup>18</sup> Gemelli Marciano 2007, 50–51; Graham 2010, 62–63; Kočandrle, Couprie 2017, 84. However, G. Wöhrle doubts that the comparison goes back to Anaximander and refers to H. Erkell (1982, 125–128).



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## Зоогония Анаксимандра: свидетельство Плутарха (Quaest. VII 8, 4 730E = 12 A 30 DK)

Александра Александровна Пименова

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет,  
Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; a.a.pimenova@inbox.ru

В трактате *Quaestiones Convivales* (730E) Плутарх указывает, что, согласно зоогонии Анаксимандра, первые живые существа зародились в рыбах, таких как οἱ γαλεοί, одном из видов селхий, который соответствует современной собачьей акуле. Плутарх упоминает γαλεοί еще в двух других трактатах (*De sollertia animalium* 33, 982A и *De amore prolis*, 494C). В двух последних случаях Плутарх описывает две особенности γαλεοί — вынашивание детенышей, напоминающее млекопитающих, и заботу о потомстве (матери позволяют им плавать вблизи, искать пищу, а затем снова выпускают внутрь своего тела). Обе эти особенности были отмечены Аристотелем (*HA* I 5. 489b11 f.; VI 10. 565b24) как характерные для большинства представителей *Selachia* (более широкого класса, чем современные селхии, или акулы), в том числе γαλεοί, и Плутарх, вероятно, следует его описанию. Напротив, нет оснований полагать, вопреки мнению ряда ученых, что Плутарх, говоря об этих рыбах, подразумевает знаменитое аристотелевское описание одной из разновидностей γαλεοί, а именно γαλεὸς λεῖος (*mustelus levis*), с его необычным способом развития эмбриона (*HA* 565b2–9). Кроме того, в своем свидетельстве об учении Анаксимандра Плутарх не мог иметь в виду вторую особенность γαλεοί — их заботу о родившемся потомстве. *Tertium comparationis* его сопоставления акул с предками людей — это развитие до рождения внутри материнского тела. Таким образом, сравнение с γαλεοί более тривиально, чем привыкли думать ученые, и, в принципе, может восходить к Анаксимандру. Вероятнее, впрочем, что его добавил сам Плутарх с целью сделать более эффектными свои доводы против употребления в пищу рыб.

**Ключевые слова:** Анаксимандр, Плутарх, Аристотель, зоогония, *mustelus levis*.